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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Palestinian Election Results
PARIS - Friday, January 27, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Palestinian Election Results

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

The overwhelming victory by Hamas is today's number one front-page story. For Le Monde, "The International Community is Faced with a Dilemma," Le Figaro headlines: "Hamas: The World is Alarmed." Liberation calls the vote "An Electoral Bomb" and France Soir asks: "Is It Possible for Terrorism and Democracy to Co-exist?" La Croix explains: "Why the Islamists Won the Elections." Some editorialists suggest the U.S. should have set conditions for Hamas before and not after the elections, while most commentators acknowledge that although the Hamas victory upsets the game plan in the Middle East, Hamas "will have to change." A number of commentators see the victory as a "slap in the face" for President Bush. (See Part C) For Mark Henry reporting from Jerusalem in Le Figaro "The nightmare has become reality: the landslide victory by Hamas has plunged Israel in a stupor. and confirmed the notion here that Israel has no Palestinian interlocutor, thus confirming Israel's need for a unilateral stance vis-a vis the territories."

La Croix interviews Alain Dieckhoff of the CNRS on the Hamas victory: "I do not think it is possible to disassociate Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. Isolating the Palestinian government could lead to an acceleration of the crisis the Palestinian Authority is facing and which is reflected in these results. But despite its victory, Hamas cannot monopolize all the power: it needs to share it with Fatah. The U.S. will probably ask Egypt to send the appropriate message to Hamas."

Liberation interviews Jean-Francois Legrain, a researcher at CNRS, who says: "This is obviously a protest vote. The Palestinians chose to sanction the lack of peace and the absence of a state. Israel's unilateral stance has rid the PLO of its only reason for being: negotiating. It is difficult to imagine Hamas and Fatah cooperating, because they are so different. A union government does not seem viable to me."

Le Parisien interviews Olivier Roy, an expert on the Middle East: "The peace process may be stalled a bit longer because of the Hamas victory. But in the mid to long-term, this will force Hamas to revise its stance. If Hamas continues with its war ideology, it cannot govern. I believe it will choose compromise with Israel."

On a separate subject, Liberation interviews Walid Jumblatt, Lebanon's anti-Syrian leader who speaks up for an international court to try political assassins: "In view of the new Iran-Syria-Lebanon axis, we must continue to fight for an independent Lebanon. even if attacks will continue. Al-Qaeda's interests and Syria's are the same: Damascus has exported many combatants to Iraq to fight the Americans. They are now coming to Lebanon. I do not wish for an Arab mediation: what Arab country would want a change of regime in Syria? But thankfully, there is Chirac, France and the agreement with the Americans to try to set up an international court."

Le Monde reports on the implementation of the new EU-5 gendarmes force (FGE) launched with France, Italy, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Portugal. Based in Vicence, Italy, the force will play a transitional role after military operations but before civilian forces take over. It will have a crisis management role. If needed, the UN and NATO will be able to call on the FGE. Defense Minister Alliot-Marie hopes the force will soon engage in operations, "in order to bolster the idea of a European defense."

La Croix reports briefly that the European Parliament would like to "question Rumsfeld and Cheney in connection with alleged CIA secret prisons," according to Sarah Ludford, Vice President of the EU Commission, but La Croix explains that Brussels has no legal power to force such individuals to be questioned.

Communist l'Humanite carries a full-page report on the Dick Marty interim report on alleged CIA prisons and Europe's so-called "alignment" with America's "reasons of state." "The investigation by the courageous Swiss Parliamentarian has the merit of showing how many European capitals are implicated in the affair, which implies a de facto submission to America's 'reasons of state.'"

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Palestinian Election Results

"Time to Make Choices"

Pierre Haski in left-of-center Liberation (01/27): "The landslide victory by Hamas has swept Fatah out of the picture and upset all the cards in the Middle East. The men who hold the reins in Hamas will have to make important choices very soon. The first test will be their attitude towards Israel's next elections. In 1996, prior to those elections, Hamas had perpetrated a series of terrorist attacks, which had played into the hands of Netanyahu, who still today would gain from a similar cycle of violence. A truce would, on the other hand, give a dynamic push to the peace process. Besides the Israelis, the West will also be watching Hamas closely. It is to be hoped that the Palestinians, who have chosen to upset the cards, will not regret their choices."

"Danger of War in Palestine"

Pierre Rousselin in right-of-center Le Figaro (01/27): "After these results, the international community must demand from Hamas that it recognize Israel and stop calling for its destruction. But the masters of Gaza are not going to convert to pacifism overnight. Actions will have to speak for themselves. Still, like the PLO in its days, Hamas is evolving. Instead of calling for violence, its members need to prove they can govern. There is a need for moderation: otherwise Hamas will turn the PLO into a war machine against Israel. The irony of the situation has not escaped anyone: the international community must help Hamas to govern. The U.S. does not want to play that game. Out of principle Washington does not want to deal with a terrorist organization. That's all fine and dandy, but maybe the Americans should have put conditions on Hamas's participation in the election process, not in their participation to the government. Now it's a bit late. No matter what, proof is in that in the Middle East democracy in itself is not enough to fight terrorism or to spread Western values. Europe is being less categorical and refuses to cut communications with the Palestinian Authority. There is the danger of a civil war or of a war, plain and simple: the transition taking place in the region is a very perilous one."

"A Somber Day"

Guillaume Goubert in Catholic La Croix (01/27): "No one other than Iran was happy about the results in the Palestinian elections. It is indeed a somber day when a movement calling for the destruction of Israel and for terrorism comes to power. This leads us to think back to all the missed opportunities since 2000. where the tiniest bit of daring and courage might have led us back on the road to the negotiations. Now we must think fast how to keep the region from igniting. Still, the relative calm surrounding the elections and the fact that Hamas chose to participate in the electoral process are to be saluted."

"The Americans Annoyed, The Europeans Make a Face"

Pascal Riche in left-of-center Liberation (01/27): "For President Bush, who has reiterated that democracy in the Middle East would destroy terrorism, these election results are a slap in the face. More so because it follows the election of a radical Islamist in Iran. But like the Europeans, Washington hopes that once faced with reality, Hamas will choose moderation and truce."

"Bush Does Not Talk to Terrorists"

Philippe Gelie in right-of-center Le Figaro (01/27): "The U.S. is apparently closing the door on the Palestinian government and by the same token on what is left of the Peace Process. The American Administration's stance is first and foremost dictated by the law: as long as Hamas is on the list of terrorist organizations it is prohibited for any American citizen to provide any assistance whatsoever to it. Yet American diplomacy discreetly encouraged Israel to allow Hamas to take part in the elections, including those candidates that are on the Israeli security's wanted list. In parallel, USAID provided some 1.9 million dollars to Fatah under the table. The result of these efforts is a slap in the face to the Americans but it is also a challenge. From Iraq to Palestine, Bush's crusade to promote democracy has the unfortunate tendency to put Islamists in power."

"A Surprise Win"

Gilles Paris in left-of-center Le Monde (01/27): "The warnings from Washington, Israel and the EU about too big a political role for Hamas may have played into the hands of Hamas: indeed

its members could not accept to participate in the elections in the name of democracy and at the same time not expect to hold a power proportionate to the results."

"Bush Suffers a Blow"

Thomas Cantaloube in right-of-center Le Parisien (01/27): "Has the U.S. fallen into its own trap? By pushing Hamas to take part in the democratic process, the White House finds itself having to deal with an organization it has qualified as `terrorist.' Nevertheless President Bush tried to give the election results a positive spin during his impromptu press conference. Still, the results look like a harsh blow to the Bush administration's foreign policy." STAPLETON